



News Release

For immediate release: August 3, 2015

(15-145)

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Newly born policy at state Department of Health allows infants at work

Agency delivers on support for breastfeeding, infant bonding, and employee wellness

OLYMPIA —In a development that could seem like an extreme youth movement at the state health department is actually the agency's newest policy to protect and improve people's health — including the health of agency employees and their families.

The state Department of Health has a new "Infants at Work Policy" based on the long term health value of breastfeeding newborns and infant/parent bonding.

The concept is the realization of the mantra of Secretary of Health John Wiesman, who has long encouraged employees to "bring their whole selves to work" each day.

"We know bonding of infants with their parents during the earliest stages of life can have positive long-term effects," Wiesman explained. "This early bonding is crucial to a baby's healthy brain development, and it's good for Mom, Dad, or guardian. We want to make breastfeeding easier and more practical for moms who want and are able to do so, because it improves lifelong health and allows new parents to bring their whole selves to work."

The new policy that was effective July 1 is similar to one Wiesman implemented as director of Clark County Public Health in Vancouver, WA, allowing infants from six weeks to six months in the workplace. Before the policy was written, Wiesman initiated a pilot project in which agency employee Marissa VanHoozer brought her baby boy to work, relieving the stress of possible financial strain that accompanied the joy of learning she and her husband were having a baby.

"My husband and I had moved here from Hawaii where we served in the Army and I was a new state employee," said VanHoozer. "I had maybe enough leave to get through my prenatal appointments but after that, I knew we'd be down to one income until I felt comfortable enough to return to work."

— More —

When Gavin, or “Office Baby” as he was better known, was 8 weeks old, he joined mom at work. VanHoozer had pre-arranged her schedule with her boss so it would be a mix of being in the office with Gavin and teleworking while her husband was on baby-duty.

While some people wonder if offering this type of program forces moms and dads back to work sooner than they’d like, VanHoozer believes it gave her more options. She felt supported and was able to work without missing out on monumental moments like a first tooth poking through or the day that Gavin started crawling at the office.

“Without this program, I would not have been there for all of Gavin’s ‘firsts,’” VanHoozer explains. “I will forever be grateful that my employer made it possible for me to be with my son for those milestones while continuing to help with our family budget and my career progression by returning to work.”

Babies and parents are beneficiaries of the program, and so is the employer. The agency expects the Infant at Work policy to help increase employee morale, lower turnover costs due to higher retention rates, and reduce overall health care costs for babies due to easy-access breastfeeding.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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